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A PROTESTANT RESPONSE TO "THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF LITURGICAL DEVOTION TO MARY RE-EXAMINED"

As a stranger in your midst I think it will clarify things if I define my understanding of my role here. Initially I agreed to come as a reactor to what sounded like an historically oriented paper on "Liturgical Witness to Our Lady Before the Seventh Century," but a shift in arrangements makes my presence as a historian a little puzzling with reference to Dr. Cochrane's paper. A contemporary theological re-examination of liturgical devotion to Mary places an historian in rather uncharted waters. Fortunately, one of the characteristics of current developments in theological education among Protestants is a tendency to be interdisciplinary in both method and content, and the task has not seemed as fearsome as I first supposed for we have been working to integrate church history and theology at our school.

If I am an historian thrashing around in somewhat unfamiliar waters, I must also admit to an inability to transcend my sympathies as a Protestant. I have tried to be as objective in my evaluation as possible, but I find my sympathies as a Protestant affect my assessment of Professor Cochrane's work. However, as I study your program I feel that this identification is not a mistake, and rather than trying to avoid my function as a Protestant reactor I confess to it and respond openly as a Protestant. The program provides proper correctives to this bias by having Orthodox and Roman Catholic reactors for balance.

So as an historian slightly afield, but mainly as a Protestant in reference to a fellow Protestant's paper, let me turn now to my evaluation of "The Theological Devotion to Mary Re-examined."

In the first place, it should be noted that the absence of liturgical devotion to Mary in mainstream Protestantism is a

background factor that consciously or unconsciously influenced what Dr. Cochrane did in his paper. With no common liturgical veneration of Mary to unite us while our intellectual inquiry takes us down divergent paths, Protestants and Catholics are forced to concentrate their efforts at communication concerning Mary in the realm of theological inquiry. Here the relationship of Protestants to Roman Catholics differs fundamentally from that of the Orthodox, as the Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican Council II clearly evidenced. In this light, it is rather natural and logical that Cochrane's paper concentrates on the "theological basis" of liturgical devotion to Mary.

There are several aspects of this theological basis that deserve attention. Dr. Cochrane's decision to shift from a study of comparative traditions concerning Mary to an evaluation of Christologies is basic to his whole method in the paper. And I concur wholeheartedly in this shift away from comparative Marian traditions as an important step in comprehending the Protestant view of Mary. Nevertheless, the explanation used by Dr. Cochrane to justify this shift, that is, because everything is being evaluated christologically these days by both Protestants and Catholics, gives the impression that the only reason for doing this is to join in a current vogue. Actually, my Protestant confrere seems to be doing so for more basic reasons. One, because that is the area of theology where Protestant evaluation of Mary takes place and this puts the issue in more familiar territory for a Protestant. And, two, because essentially Cochrane accepts Barth's Christological base and that is where Barth placed the issue in his systematic theology. If I am correct in this judgment, then I willingly join Cochrane in his thesis "that the root cause of our differences concerning the person and work of Mary lies in our differences concerning the Person and work of Jesus Christ," but I would maintain that the reason is more basic than to join in a popular contemporary use of Christology to understand all doctrines.

If I am wrong in making this judgment about his basic

decision concerning Christology, then I would raise an objection to his reference to Christology in the paper. When Dr. Cochrane suggests that contemporary theology is characterized by "the return to christology," he implies that more recent theology has been non-christological. In Protestant theology this has not been exactly the case. One of the most dominant and influential theological schools of thought in recent decades was Liberalism, and one of the main branches of that school was a Christocentric Liberalism that had its roots in Horace Bushnell in America and in Friederich Schleiermacher on the Continent.¹ The distinction between this earlier group and current theologians was not Christology as such, but the emphasis within Christology. The Christocentric Liberal theologians stressed the humanity of Jesus and talked much about the Man of Nazareth; whereas today's Protestant theologians, influenced greatly by the shift from systematic theology to biblical theology, have stressed the Christ of faith more than the human Jesus. Or, more accurately, they have tended to emphasize the unity of the God-man, Jesus the Christ, by stressing what John Knox has called the "Christ-event"—the totality of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of our Lord.² Thus, the proper distinction to make is not between a new turn to Christology in contrast to an avoidance of Christology, but rather a change of emphasis within Christology.

Whether right or wrong about the reason for Cochrane's making Christology the central focus for his theological re-examination of Mary, it appears that he has replaced comparative traditions about Mary with a comparison of Christologies in relation to Mary held by two ranking contemporary theologians.

¹ Kenneth Cauthen, *The Impact of American Religious Liberalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, and Lefferts Loetscher, *American Christianity*, Vol. II 1820-1960 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), pp. 255-265.

² John Knox, *On the Meaning of Christ* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953).

Prof. Cochrane's comparison of "the two Karls, Karl Rahner and Karl Barth" is a second vital facet of his method in examining the theological basis for Marian devotion. The central importance of these two theologians is hard to dispute. You at this meeting know better than I the great contributions of Rahner to modern Catholic theology. There may be some who are more authoritative on Mariology but probably there is no more formidable general theologian in your Church. In Protestantism it is difficult to over-estimate the significance of Barth in this century. But at the same time it is necessary to note that Barth is only a leader of one aspect of contemporary Protestant theology. We also have our celebrated "Death-of-God" theologians, the worldly disciples of Bonhoeffer, Bultmannians, fundamentalists and neo-evangelicals, and others who are hard to brand but who would resort to the dangerous but simplistic biblicism of which Cochrane warned. Karl Barth himself indicates this distinction from other Protestant groups in the sentences immediately following the long passage concerning "the Marian dogma of Romanism" from the Preface of Vol. IV, Pt. 2, of *Church Dogmatics*, which Cochrane quoted in his paper.³ Thus, in using Barth, the writer of the paper selected a major and formative theologian whose system is very influential, but Catholic readers ought not assume that he represents all of Protestantism. Having given this warning, however, I must admit that I know of no other theologian who would better illustrate the basic Protestant stance on this subject.

In making his comparison of Rahner and Barth, Cochrane evidences a quality that is lost in hearing the paper rather than reading it. He demonstrates a fine ability to integrate quotations from the two theologians into his own sentences without distorting their meaning. In written form this adds much to the reader's impression of the ideas of Rahner and Barth

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), Vol. IV, Pt. 2, Preface, p. x.

coming through. Importantly, Cochrane does not quote merely for the sake of quotation, but he places the words of the theologians in his own thought forms and clearly demonstrates that he has digested them. While I am not an authority on either Rahner or Barth, I did sample the footnote citations in the original works and found them to be accurate and in accord with the basic ideas the writers were seeking to convey.

It is indicative of either my Protestant bias, or the present state of Protestant-Catholic dialogue, but I find myself in accord with Barth's position and with Cochrane's fourfold conclusion about the implications arising from the comparison of the Christologies of Rahner and Barth. It seems to me that these conclusions might form the basis for a substantial dialogue session among Protestant and Catholic theologians for they get at the heart of our differences concerning Mary. I concur with Cochrane that the humility and obedience of the Virgin is a unique example of the faith expected of all Christians: "Mary is preeminently the type and pattern of the true Christian and the true Church . . ." But she has no specially exalted role that has any efficacy other than that of example.

In his re-examination of the theological basis of Marian devotion Prof. Cochrane raises several questions which might well stimulate Catholic Mariologists in their thinking about the Virgin Mary. But in the final analysis, at this point in history, I doubt that Mariologists will accept his response to his last question, "What, then, in light of christology can a 'liturgical devotion to Mary mean'?" for he concludes that she is preeminently only an example of faith, obedience, and service.

The basis for our differences as Protestants and Catholics concerning Mary lies in more than Mary herself. Dr. Cochrane has placed the difference in Christology and has done so provocatively, with erudition, and good insight into the basic issues from a Protestant perspective. In contrast to Cochrane, I think I would locate the basic theological difference in soteriology rather than in Christology. The category of salvation picks up

most everything said in this paper, and in other literature on the subject, but it appears to me to have the advantage of not forcing the Marian issue into the dilemma of subsuming Mariology under Christology or of separating Mariology from Christology. Rather it might permit theologians to see both Mary and Christ in their proper roles in God's saving redemption of mankind. It is worth noting that Barth discusses the Person and work of Christ under the major heading of "The Doctrine of Reconciliation," which is soteriology in my estimation.⁴

But I must not go on any longer, for I promised myself not to indulge in the cardinal sin of commentators on papers, that of trying to write one's own paper at the expense of the original writer. In this particular instance that would be a grave injustice, for Prof. Cochrane's paper is a commendable piece of work. It is carefully argued, soundly grounded, and a substantial contribution to the subject from the Protestant point of view.

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⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, Pts. 1, 2, 3.1, 3.2.